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THE GRUMBLER IN BOSTON TOWN

It is one thing to know a thing and another thing to know you know a thing; but perhaps the most difficult thing of all is to have Someone find out that you know you know it, for then you are set down as an adept or as an ass, whichever way Someone's caprice dictates. So half of the time you are not expected to know anything at all, and if you do you run the risk of ridicule. However, away back when certain spirited colonists had come to know they knew a thing or two, they established the focus of their various determinations in the eyes of posterity in their gritty "Boston Tea Party," and in the borough of the fruitful bean this same definite spirit of assertion has made the Bostonians representative, en masse, of American intellectuality—the Certain One says the intellectuality of Book Reviews, but that is superfluous. All this is why I collected my etheriality on a pivot, and rolled into Boston and Cambridge, not to learn anything new especially—bless you, no!—but rather to be some place where what I knew already could be appreciated when now and then I choose to mix. I think I told you once that Shades never grow old: they can't, you know. Or if I didn't tell you, it's a good time to say now, at the same time we age in the sense of our acquirements, or more properly, we expand. Indeed, there is no limit to our expansion, and the aerial area which the molecules of my imagination occupy is an extent, for example, which requires the most extreme deftness upon my part to compress and to bring to such a concretion that you can take my hand, shake it, and say, "A fine day, isn't it?"

While I have been ruminating in this pleasant-wise, I have heard the Pencil impatiently tapping on a most material table-top to remind me that I am not keeping to art, and that I am even getting far from Boston. The Brush is more lenient; but for sake of peace and quiet (you can't get it in Manhattan for any compromise) I'll stop here a while in Cambridge. There is art here—true art, the art of living, and the art of things. Old Harvard is more like Oxford than any of you who may not have been there would imagine. Its literaryness is refreshing and manly, and things are quite æsthetic in spite of pipes and athletics. After all, these things can go together; for that art is rather the best art which combines with things away from the sphere of its realm, if the combination is merely graceful. Yes, Harvard is even more æsthetic than I found Oxford to be, and I have known Oxford these hundreds of years. Perhaps it's the way the men live; not in so scholarly a manner here as there, perhaps, but here

they have surrounded themselves with artistic things. In their chambers there is a joyousness about it all, but you don't find the fret-saw scrollwork brackets the Oxford majority rests its artistic appreciation upon. In one of the Harvard dormitories, for instance, behold the exquisite little breakfast-room, simple in its Flemish oak appointments and decorated with a fine poster-frieze by Mr. Edward Penfield. The men like such things, and that's why I'm speaking of it, because I've a notion that your average art patron is an obnoxious personage, whose agent's are worth more than his opinions, and one of a human sect which needs the reformation of supplantation by some of these youngsters of yours who are learning an appreciation of things now in the time of their educational foundations. I know of some of the schools in your country, some of the things called colleges and universities, where there is no such spirit of art flitting hither and thither, but I know of a great many more where things are otherwise; and, as I have tried to say, Harvard is with such.

Perhaps it is Cambridge itself which has backed up this æsthetic state of affairs, and it is quite likely, for nearly every tramway conductor I met or flew into there—we are like helpless birds sometimes—had a copy of the *Atlantic* or the *Literary Review* “protruding from the receptacle of his outermost garment,” as the Certain One would put it, maliciously. I say maliciously, because I put Cambridge and Boston etymology to a severe test the other day, when I stepped up to a native and said: “Primarily craving the dispensation of your pardon, I hasten to inform you, sir, that the article which I have just remanded from its place on the pavement is to all appearances your ocular assistance.” I repeated it. He looked blank, but glancing at the pince-nez I held out to him, he said, suddenly comprehending, “Oh, you mean I have lost my glasses! Thank you!” Whereat I knew that the revilers of Baltimore and Kankakee had done the descendants of Bunker libelous injury through unjust imputation, and I think the Bostonian is a very patient creature. The Certain One says it's because he's self-sufficient. I'll admit that it was something when the Bacchante was rejected, but let that pass, and let the directors of the Metropolitan Museum take a jaunt—Fall River Line, if they find railway too expensive—and visit the Boston Museum of Art to learn what an art museum may be like. I have been with poor Puvis de Chavannes when he was on earth and painting, and I watched him do the decorations for the Boston Public Library, where Sargent is at his best, and I remonstrated with him. Well, they're there, and I'll not say anything about them; it would make me sad, and it might seem unkind, you know—and the Copley prints are very good. I found another Whistler at the museum—a marine. It had no tag, and it scarcely deserved one, and I stood and looked at “Little Rose,” looked so long I quite forgot that the hands—to my mind—are the most abominably painted things I ever

saw; that is, that ever I saw in your day and generation, for you must not forget what a tremendous amount of stuff I, as a Shade, have seen. Indeed, I have seen so much and I have done so many things that it is not at all easy to bring myself to any level of comprehension, and I think it is nice and patient in you to listen to me at all.

Last week, Someone, who heard me speaking about mountains and all that, wrote to me—yes, actually wrote, believing I was material (if it hadn't been for the Little Bird I might never have known of it, for you must know, my dear friends, that all letters addressed to Shades finally stick in the Dead Letter Office)—as I started to say, wrote to me, and asked if I could judge the authenticity of a painting supposed to be a Luini. Now, who ever heard of the like of it! Of course I could judge of a Luini, an Angelina Louisa, or anything else in canvas or clay. However, I am only telling you this to show you that I am somebody, or Someone would never have written that letter. That very spirit recognition is rather characteristic of the Bostonian. The Brush tells me the Hub is a nice place, in his opinion, but a sorry place for an artist to live. Well, think it over. The Other One tells me he's going there to live next year—he's astonishingly poor, you know—because he says he can live in Boston better on nothing than he can in Manhattan. When you think of it the City of Great Things is a hard place to be poor in, for you're only supposed to pass once in the panorama of its possibilities, and you may say backward things about Boston, and you may wonder until doomsday why all the little children wear specs, and why the natives stop on the Common to dig dandelion greens; it's a rest just the same. Even though Turner's "Slave Ship," which hangs in the museum in an honored position, and even though the Bostonians leave heaps of snow to melt away on the steps of the Public Library, you can't deny that there are possibilities of artistic refuge in the town, and the Fogg Museum in Cambridge has some fine prints by Rembrandt and Dürer. Then was not Boston Town the Cradle of artistic photography in America? But here I must pause, for it will never do to go on at this rate. I must think up a few fallacies and expose them to you, who forget to think sometimes. Yes, I must do this, else in forgetting to grumble I will forget to be.

THE GRUMBLER.